

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 IO-13 ACDA-07  
DHA-05 SCA-01 AID-05 HEW-04 /095 W  
-----128093 311225Z /50

O R 311140Z AUG 77  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5712  
AMCONSUL UDORN  
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE  
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 19375

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PBOR, LA, TH, SHUM, PDIP  
SUBJ: THAI-LAO BORDER CLOSURE AT NONG KHAI-THA DEUA

REF: VIENTIANE 1243

SUMMARY: DIPLOMATS, INCLUDING U.S. VIENTIANE EMBOFF CHAMBERLIN,  
RETURNED SAFELY TO VIENTIANE AT 1430 AUG 31. 69 REFUGEES BEING DE-  
TAINED AND CARED FOR IN NONG KHAI PENDING RTG DECISION ON CASE.  
EMBASSY HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SENIOR MINISTRY OF INTERIOR  
OFFICIAL CONCERNED WITH REFUGEE OPERATIONS, AND WE HAVE  
POINTED OUT TO HIM OUR CONCERN THAT REFUGEES SHOULD NOT RPT  
NOT BE FORCIBLY REPATRIATED. I WILL BE SEEING MINISTER  
OF INTERIOR SAMAK SEPT 1, AND I WILL REITERATE THIS  
POINT. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSULATE UDORN INFORMED US AT 1545 AUG 31 THAT VIENTIANE  
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DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL TEMPORARILY STRANDED AT NONG KHAI,  
INCLUDING EMBOFF CHAMBERLIN FROM EMBASSY VIENTIANE, RETURNED  
SAFELY AND WITHOUT INCIDENT TO VIENTIANE AT 1430 ON TWO  
BOATS, ONE ACH FLYING THAI AND LAOTIOAN FLAGS. GROUP  
ALSO INCLUDED FRG AMBASSADOR AND HIS WIFE, FRG EMBASSY  
DCM, UN PERSONNEL, AND ONE OR TWON VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATS.

2. REGARDING REFUGEES, CONSUL FINNEY, WHO WAS WITH NONG KHAI PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR CHAMNAN POTCHANA, FROM 1430 TO 1530, TELEPHONED FOLLOWING REPORT FROM UDORN; 69 REFUGEES INCLUDE 4 THAI DAM FAMILIES, 6 LOWLAND LAO FAMILIES, ONE CHINESE FAMILY AND ONE VIETNAMESE FAMILY. IN THE DOZEN FAMILIES THERE ARE ROUGHLY ONE DOZEN CHILDREN, A DOZEN TEENAGERS AND HALF DOZEN ELDERLY PEOPLE. ALL APPEARED TO BE LOWER MIDDLE CLASS SHOPKEEPPERS. THEY GAVE THEIR REASONS FOR FLEEING: A) AN INABILITY TO MAKE A LIVING; B) INSUFFICIENT FOOD TO SURVIVE; C) DISLIKE FOR NEW SOCIAL SYSTEM IN LAOS. ONE FAMILY CLAIMS TO HAVE MEMBER (UNACCOMPANYING) ONCE AFFILIATED WITH THE CIA. SOME APPARENTLY HAVE THAI RELATIVES LIVING IN NONG KHAI, WHILE OTHERS CLAIM RELATIVE IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND.

3. ACCORDING TO GOVERNOR CHAMNAN, REFUGEES TRAVELLED FROM VIENTIANE TO THA DEUA CROSSING POINT BY TRUCK WITH NOTE, HANDWRITTEN BY LOW-RANKING SECURITY OR MILITARY OFFICIAL, WHICH ALLOWED THEM TO PASS ONE OR TWO SECURITY CHECKPOINTS. REFUGEES WERE REQUIRED TO PAY LAO IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AN AVERAGE OF 1,000 BAHT (\$50 US) PER ADULT, ALTHOUGH SOME HAD TO PAY AS MUCH AS 3,000 BAHT EACH. GROUP BEGAN CROSSING RIVER ABOUT 1600 AUGUST 30 IN REGULAR WATER TAXIS WHICH OPERATE BETWEEN THA DEUA AND NONG KHAI.

4. REFUGEES BROUGHT LARGE QUANTITIES OF HOUSEHOLD GOODS,  
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SUITCASES, SACKS OF CLOTHING, COOKINGWARE, FISH SAUCE AND OTHER FOOD.

5. GOVERNOR TOLD CONSUL FINNEY THAT THIS GROUP HAD BEEN PRECEDED AUG 29 BY BOAT CARRYING TWO FAMILIES OF ELEVEN PEOPLE. EARLIER ELEVEN WERE BEING TREATED AS REFUGEES, BUT APPEARANCE OF 69 ADDITIONAL PERSONS AND LIKELIHOOD THEY WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY MANY OTHERS, LED GOVERNOR TO SEEK PERMISSION TO CLOSE THE CROSSING POINT TEMPORARILY.

6. GOVERNOR WANTS TO REPATRIATE THE 69, WHO ARE NOW OFF THE BOAT, SQUATTING IN THE NONG KHAI IMMIGRATION BUILDING. RTG, THROUGH ITS EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE, HAS CONTACTED THE LAO GOVERNMENT SEEKING AGREEMENT TO REPATRIATE THE GROUP. OFFICER OF THAI EMBASSY VIENTIANE HAS INFORMED GOVERNOR CHAMNAN THAT LAO AUTHORITIES ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE GROUP. REFUGEES INFORMED GOVERNOR THEY NEITHER WISHED NOR WERE WILLING TO RETURN TO LAOS.

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NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 IO-13 ACDA-07  
DHA-05 SCA-01 AID-05 HEW-04 /095 W  
-----128172 311224Z /50

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7. GOVERNOR PLANS TO MOVE REFUGEES TO PROVINCIAL RED CROSS BUILDING WHERE THEY WILL BE HOUSED AND FED TONIGHT. CONSUL FINNEY ADVISES US THAT GOVERNOR WOULD NOT TAKE FURTHER ACTION WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS FROM MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, WHICH HE EXPECTS PROBABLY TOMORROW MORNING. FINNEY HAS DEFINITE IMPRESSION GOVERNOR WOULD FORCIBLY REPATRIATE THE LAO REFUGEES IF SO INSTRUCTED BY AUTHORITIES IN BANGKOK. GOVERNOR WOULD NOT ACT ON HIS OWN, BUT HOPES TO RECEIVE REPATRIATION ORDER TOMORROW.

8. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN HIMSELF PLANS TO DEPART UDORN TONIGHT FOR BANGKOK FOR AN ALREADY-PLANNED TRIP STARTING SATURDAY TO THE FRG. IN HIS ABSENCE, FINNEY ADVISES US, VICE GOVERNOR SOMBUN THAIWATCHARAMAT WOULD ACT RESPONSIBLY, EFFECTIVELY AND ONLY ON ORDERS FROM BANGKOK. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN URGED THE US TO ACCEPT THE 69 AS A "WONDERFUL HUMANITARIAN GESTURE".  
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10. CONSUL FINNEY COMMENTED TO EMBASSY THAT THE FAMILIES APPEAR TO HIM TO BE GENUINE REFUGEES, BECAUSE OF THE

REASONS THEY GAVE FOR FLEEING AND INASMUCH AS THEY BROUGHT THEIR YOUNG AND OLD, AS WELL AS THEIR BELONGINGS WITH THEM.

11. EMBASSY CONTACTED MFA IMMEDIATELY AFTER RECEIVING REFTEL TO REQUEST RTG EFFORTS TO FACILITATE RETURN OF DIPLOMATS TO VIENTIANE. MFA INFORMED US LATER THAT THE THAI EMBASSY WAS CONTACTING THE LAO GOVERNMENT REGARDING ARRANGEMENTS TO PERMIT THE RETURN OF THE DIPLOMATS TO VIENTIANE. AT SAME TIME, MFA INFORMED US THAT GOVERNOR CHAMNAN HAD REQUESTED PERMISSION TO CLOSE THE BORDER FOR ONLY ONE DAY WHILE THE RTG CONSULTED LAOTIAN AUTHORITIES AND LOOKED INTO THE "SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THIS GROUP OF REFUGEES".

12. AT CHARGE'S INSTRUCTION, BARNES CONTACTED LT. COL KAMON PRACHUAPMO, DIRECTOR OF REFUGEE OPERATIONS, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. BARNES CONVEYED TO KAMON OUR CONCERN THAT REFUGEES SHOULD NOT RPT NOT BE FORCIBLY REPATRIATED. KAMON NOTED POINT BUT DID NOT RPT NOT MAKE ANY SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT.

13. EARLIER IN THE DAY, CHARGE AND BARNES HAD MET WITH MFA INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DIRECTOR PHIRAPHONG KASEMSI TO CONVEY DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN RE INDICATIONS THAT RTG IS MOVING TO RESTRICTIVE POLICY WITH DANGER OF EVENTUAL FORCIBLE REPATRIATION. IN THAT CONVERSATION, PHIRAPHONG INDICATED THAT NO DECISION HAD BEEN MADE ON THESE REFUGEES AND THE GOVERNMENT HAD VERY INCOMPLETE INFORMATION ON WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

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14. COMMENT: GOVERNOR'S REACTION OBVIOUSLY BASED ON HIS CONCERN THAT LPDR WAS OPENING FLOOD GATES, IN EFFECT, ENCOURAGING REFUGEE OUTFLOW INTO THILAND (AT A PRICE). SENIOR THAI OFFICIALS ARE ALREADY EXTREMELY SENSITIVE BY INCREASING REFUGEE INFLOW INTO NONG KHAI CAMP.

15. BOTH HERE AND TO NONG KHAI GOVERNOR WE HAVE MADE CLEAR OUR CONCERNS, DESPITE THE OBVIOUS PROBLEMS THIS PARTICULAR CASE POSES FOR RTG. I DO NOT RPT NOT KNOW WHAT COURSE OF EVENTS WILL BE. HOWEVER, I AM ALREADY SCHEDULED TO SEE INTERIOR MINISTER SAMAK SEPT 1 AND I WILL CONTINUE TO EXPRESS OUR CONCERN ABOUT FORCIBLE REPATRIATION, UNLESS DEPARTMENT WISHES OTHERWISE. O'DONOHUE

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## Message Attributes

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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
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